

To: The State of South Carolina Education Oversight Committee

From: Dr. Peggie A. Grant

Re: Requested Information for *“Looking Forward: Building Upon Common Ground in South Carolina’s Changing Environment” meeting*

Date: June 13, 2006

I am writing in response to some of the questions you identified that will be part of the upcoming June 27th *“Looking Forward: Building Upon Common Ground in South Carolina’s Changing Environment” meeting in Georgetown, S.C.* Rural schools are expected to challenge and to meet students’ needs at the same level of performance as that of other schools. As principal of a Title I school consisting of 99% minority and 87% poverty students, the challenges are many. Continued collaboration efforts among mental health agencies, social services, law enforcement, and civic groups are important. More and more students come to school with emotional “baggage” and/or abuse that needs to be addressed before academic success in school can be achieved. Currently, our school has a mental health worker on our campus four days a week. Her services could be utilized five days a week. Each year, more and more families are identified that need specialized interventions. Many of our students are being raised by grandparents. Continued networking of support for grandparents, as well as, single parents is needed. Often, the individuals responsible for the care of students don’t have the understanding or awareness of sources of help available to them. Civic groups that would provide male mentoring for students would also be very helpful. Mentoring could include such simple things as spending time with a male student while eating lunch and discussing the positive and/or negative things that are happening with the student.

Community activities that support rural students are very important. This year the Georgetown YMCA provided an after-school program and a summer program. The organized activities not only provided homework support, but also worked on important social skills that increased opportunities. Scholarships also were available to assist families. I see this organization as a critical team member in helping our students to achieve in life. Another important component that is assisting our rural students is the 21st Century Learning Community Center Grant that provides monies for after-school and summer activities that support homework and learning. Civic groups and businesses support schools in many ways: contributions of “in-kind” services and cash, volunteer hours, and materials. Some agencies and businesses provide awards and monies for student recognitions. Motivation is often a challenge for some of our students who face many obstacles each day. Any community support in rewarding students for accomplishments and improvement is welcomed.

High-achieving students need continued opportunities that challenge them: knowledgeable teachers who are current on issues and provide instruction that requires students to apply knowledge and skills in meaningful real-world activities and technology such as Promethean Boards and Classroom Performance Systems. Partnerships with

business and civic groups could also be a springboard for getting students involved with real-world projects.

Schools are expected to continue to raise their student expectations. By 2014, all students in South Carolina are expected to perform at a “proficient” level. Schools have identified students with special needs. These students qualify for extra help. Educators are to meet those students where they are and to continue providing interventions that help them to succeed. I am concerned the 2014 goal will be setting these students up for failure, as well as, their teachers. Not all students have the same ability and will meet a “proficient” level. I believe these unrealistic goals are causing quality teachers to leave the system and deterring a future generation of new, energized teaching candidates.

At the school level, the nurse, guidance counselor, mental health counselor, and administrators make home visits in an effort to provide help for students. The guidance counselor and the mental health counselor assist families in making necessary appointments to improve students’ health. The Universal Breakfast Program, along with the lunch program, guarantees that our students have two balanced meals each day.

Our school received the SC READS Grant in 2001. With those monies we were able to bring young mothers and their small children to our campus. The parents received opportunities to work on their GED and/or diploma while their young child was provided an appropriate learning environment and nutritious meals. Parenting skills and appropriate interactions with their child were modeled and taught. The young mothers felt more at ease on the elementary campus. Monies to meet these types of challenges are needed. Often, “babies” are raising “babies”. If children born into these families are to be successful, the parent(s) must be given the skills and knowledge necessary to meet the parenting roles. Transportation is a problem for these families. Transportation needs must be addressed. One of the concerns that our rural community faces is that parents don’t have transportation. Many of our families pay for weekly bus transportation in order to work at the beach for minimum wages. Once transportation costs are paid, there is little left for other needs.

Poverty impacts lives. Emotional stability and physical needs are left unmet. Community meetings with all stakeholders can be the catalyst that identifies ways to improve education for students, especially those surviving in poverty.